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## Revitalizing the First-Suburbs: The Importance of the Social Capital-Community Development Link in Suburban Neighborhood Revitalization — A Case Study

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# Revitalizing the First-Suburbs: The Importance of the Social Capital-Community Development Link in Suburban Neighborhood Revitalization—A Case Study

JoAnna Mitchell-Brown

## Abstract

This article examines the link between social capital and community development. The purpose is to increase the understanding of social capital and its role and function in the neighborhood revitalization process within first-suburbs (also known as inner-ring suburbs). In doing so, it briefly outlines the challenges of the first-suburbs, in light of suburban decline. It also addresses the role and function of social capital as a community development tool within the first-suburbs. Finally, this piece provides case study examples describing the context in which first-suburban communities mobilize and use their social capital to implement community development initiatives, with the focus on the Greater Cincinnati region.

## Introduction—The Challenges of First-Suburbs

Over the last several decades, inner-ring suburbs have encountered suburban decline. These first-suburbs, generally referred to as bedroom communities, developed just outside the central cities after World War II (Orfield, 2002; Hudnut, 2003; Lucy & Phillips, 2006; Puentes & Warren, 2006; Peiser & Schmitz, 2007; Puentes & Orfield, 2007; Hanlon & Vicino, 2008). Lucy and Phillips (2000, 2006) describe suburban decline as suburbs that experience shrinking business districts, declining residential neighborhoods, population loss, diminishing size and function of economic and political structures, and the emergence of crime and deterioration (see Table 1).

Problems of decline associated with the inner city are now visible in the first-suburbs. However, unlike their urban counterparts, which often receive federal, state, and county level support (both policy and financial assistance), first-suburbs often lack the support mechanisms necessary to alleviate decline and encourage community reinvestment (Puentes & Orfield, 2006). According to the Progressive Policy Institute (2004), the deterioration of housing and infrastructure and business districts creates a downward spiral for inner-ring suburban neighborhoods. Puentes and Orfield (2007) maintain that these challenges are urgent in nature and should be handled with seriousness. Many of the first-suburbs lack economic resources to respond to/handle these challenges. They are thus unable to combat the increasing distress and out-migration (of families and jobs) that create a downward spiral of instability and decline (Orfield, 2002; Puentes & Orfield, 2007). Further, the problems facing first-suburbs have been exacerbated by the recent foreclosure

crisis and economic recession. In addition to budget woes resulting from the economic and housing crisis, many first-suburban communities face problems associated with high volumes of vacant and blighted properties (Schiller, 2007).

With elected officials and administrators of first-suburban communities facing budget constraints and increased threats to neighborhood stability, it is important to revisit the idea of social capital as a tool for community development. Social capital as a mechanism of community development has been explored over the past two decades. However, much of the research on this topic focused on its role and function in the revitalization of low-income communities across the United States and beyond, and to a lesser extent on lower- to middle-income first-suburban communities.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the social capital-community development link in relation to suburban decline. In doing so, I analyze the social capital and community development process. I then examine neighborhood revitalization and stability in light of this connection, pointing out criticisms of social capital. Next, the paper provides an overview of first-suburbs challenges, illustrated by examples of first-ring suburbs and the way in which their particular contexts affect how social capital is mobilized and implemented in community development initiatives, drawing from local case examples of the Greater Cincinnati region.

## Research Methodology

This research was prompted by my experiences as a housing planner for Housing Opportunities Made Equal (HOME) and the Hamilton County

**Table 1.** First-Suburbs Challenges—Social Capital and Community Development Potential

<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Declining Residential Neighborhoods and Population/Demographic Changes</b>	Out-migration of households. In-migration of racially and economically diverse households and families (Lucy & Phillips, 2006; Peiser & Schmitz, 2007; Puentes & Orfield, 2007).
<b>Aging Infrastructure and Housing Stock/Vacancies and Foreclosures/Property Maintenance</b>	Aging housing stock and declining real estate values; property maintenance and abandonment of homes; increase in foreclosures (Lucy & Phillips, 2006; Peiser & Schmitz, 2007; Puentes & Orfield, 2007).
<b>Declining/Shrinking Business District</b>	Declining shopping centers and commercial activity pose a threat to the survival and stability of first-suburbs. As big box retail and mega shopping malls gain the competitive advantage in the market, declining first-suburbs struggle to reinvigorate their declining commercial districts (Lucy & Phillips, 2006; Peiser & Schmitz, 2007; Puentes & Orfield, 2007).
<b>Emergence of Crime</b>	Problems of economic decline are often associated with the city or urban areas, which are depicted “as place[s] of crime and discontent” (Vale, 1995, p. 646) and have become a growing problem for inner-ring suburbs (Short, 2007; Vicino, 2008).
<b>Aging Infrastructure/Fiscal Distress</b>	A growing number of first-suburbs are experiencing a decline in tax base per household and increasing social and economic needs (Lucy & Phillips, 2006; Puentes & Orfield, 2007). Compounding this problem, first-suburbs are unable to access grants, capital, and flexible financing available to urban cities. Most first-suburbs do not qualify for federal and state grants or loans because they do not meet the low-income targets for economic development assistance.

Compiled by Mitchell-Brown, 2011

Regional Planning Commission (HCRPC) beginning in January 2007. Both HOME and HCRPC saw a need for intervention in the suburbs to address issues of affordable workforce housing, particularly in first-suburb communities. In 2006, the agencies partnered and submitted a joint grant application to the United Way of Greater Cincinnati to hire a housing planner to work with first-ring suburbs in developing housing plans and programs that would promote affordable workforce housing. When they received funding in 2007, I was hired for this position.

In my brief time in this position, it became evident that although there was a clear need for decent and affordable housing options in the first-suburbs, few groups beyond the local municipalities were willing or able to assist in this effort. There has been a long history of resistance to affordable housing in the suburbs. In many suburban communities opposition occurs due to beliefs that affordable housing will introduce incompatible types of housing into the community (i.e., multi-family within a single-family residential neighborhood) or that where affordable housing

is introduced, there will soon be a blighted neighborhood.

Beyond housing, I noticed other issues of neighborhood decline in the first-suburbs that affected the community’s ability to improve its residential neighborhoods. These were problems mainly stemming from economic matters, such as vacancies in the business district and other social ills related to increases in poverty. I observed that there were small informal and formal organizations within the communities trying to address some of these issues of decline.

In my quest to develop realistic strategies for the first-suburb communities in Hamilton County, I started to research and interview staff at several community development corporations (CDCs) in the Greater Cincinnati region. I conducted a literature review on CDCs, including their history and role in promoting affordable workforce housing in the suburbs.

This study utilizes a primarily qualitative and descriptive multiple case study research design to explore and compare types of community social capital mobilized in response to economic

and neighborhood decline in three inner-ring suburbs in the Greater Cincinnati area. Focusing on nonprofit housing community development corporations working in the selected suburbs, the research 1) ethnographically characterizes or describes the social networks and community improvement efforts within each suburb and 2) compares and contrasts types of social capital across suburbs. Data came from three primary sources: 1) key informant and social network interviews with executive staff of nonprofit housing CDCs and local government officials in the first-suburbs of Elmwood Place and Mount Healthy; 2) participant observations of nonprofit housing CDCs in the selected suburbs, including my personal experiences and observations as a housing planner; and 3) archival data. Interview coding, descriptive statistics, and content analysis were the primary methods used. At the heart of this research is the concept of triangulation, where findings are drawn after discovering the same patterns playing out using multiple data sources and methods (Yin, 2004).

### The Social Capital and Community Development Process

The community development process strives to stabilize economic conditions, increase quantity and quality of housing to support development and improve quality of life, improve commercial functions, physical aspects and attractiveness of the community, and provide a variety of public services to support quality development outcomes (Phillips, 2002). In order to accomplish these objectives, communities need social capital. Social capital comprises the social ties and networks in the community development process. Community development literature generally refers to social capital as the catalyst that leads or facilitates the community development process. It is the extent to which members of a community can work together effectively to develop and sustain strong relationships, solve problems, and collaborate to accomplish collective goals (Putnam, 1993; Woolcock, 2001; Phillips & Pittman, 2009). Dale and Onyx (2005) contend there is a general intuitive sense that social capital strengthens communities and is a necessary ingredient for community development.

Social capital alone cannot revitalize communities; other forms of community capital are also

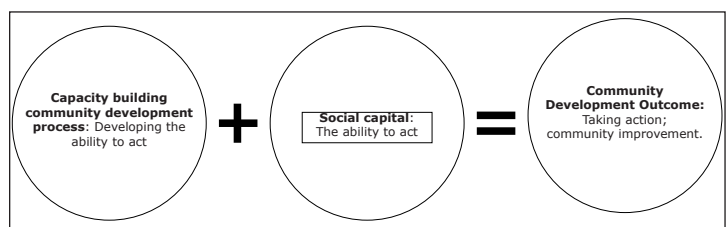
needed. The other forms of community capital that are also part of the community development process comprise human capital (e.g., labor and volunteer), physical capital (e.g., public infrastructure), financial capital (e.g., loans, grants, donations), and environmental capital (e.g. natural resources, green space). Yet, although these other forms of community capital are important, social capital is the glue for holding the other kinds of capital together. For instance, social capital building leads to social capital being created, which in turn leads to the outcome of community development. Consequently, when citizens see positive results (outcomes), they generally become more enthused and introduce more energy into the community development process because they see the payoff (Phillips & Pittman, 2009). By investing resources in communities, social entrepreneurs augment social capital and facilitate social action (Portes & Landolt, 2000; Dhesi, 2010). Therefore, it can be implied that collective social capital can lead to better governance and its existence to better community outcomes (See Figure 1).

### Neighborhood Revitalization and Stability—Social Capital and Community Development Link

In recent decades, the concept of social capital has been broadly used to explain neighborhood dynamics, particularly its deep connection to neighborhood revitalization issues. This link between social capital and neighborhood-level social and economic conditions has not gone unnoticed by community development analysts and practitioners. The Committee for Economic Development (1995), for example, argues that social capital development should be one of the emphases of community development.

In addition, many studies have linked the presence of social capital to neighborhood revitalization and increased stability. For example, research conducted by Marwell (2000) examined the different types of social capital

**Figure 1.** Community Development Chain



Adapted from Phillips, R., & Pittman, R.H. (2009). *An Introduction to Community Development*. New York: Routledge.

created by nonprofit organizations pursuing social and physical revitalization work in Williamsburg and Bushwick, two low-income urban neighborhoods in Brooklyn, New York. She concludes that social capital yields improvements within neighborhoods. For instance, she found Williamsburg has strong social capital for engaging in communitarian democratic practices that produced improvements to neighborhood social infrastructure, while Bushwick has strong social capital for accessing financial resources that bring enhancements to the neighborhood's physical infrastructure. Additionally, an empirical study by Temkin and Rohe (1998) examined neighborhoods in Pittsburgh and found that social capital is more important to strong neighborhoods than other more traditional indicators such as physical capital and vacancy rates. They conclude that social capital "should be included in any neighborhood revitalization or stabilization effort" (p. 86).

There is also increasing evidence that social capital has a significant positive effect on quality of life and economic growth within neighborhoods (e.g., Putnam, 1993; Knack & Keefer, 1997; Beugelsdijk & Smulders, 2003; Ogorzalek, 2004). Putnam (1993) showed that the density and scope of local civic associations laid the foundations for the widespread dissemination of information and social trust, thereby creating the conditions underpinning effective governance and economic development. In Putnam's view, social capital consists of resources within communities. These resources are created through the presence of high levels of trust, reciprocity and mutuality, shared norms of behavior, shared commitment and belonging, both formal and informal social networks, and effective information channels. Putnam asserts that social capital resources when used productively by individuals and groups to facilitate actions, benefit individuals, groups, and the community. He concludes that decreasing levels of social capital induces negative impacts for the overall quality of life within communities (e.g., ethnic tension, lower political efficacy, less collective action, lower confidence and trust in government, perception of lower quality of life of residents) (Putnam, 1993, 2000, 2003; New Economist Foundation, 2000). Putnam's theory of social capital seems to validate the potential of community development for improving distressed neighborhoods and encouraging social networks and norms characterized by trust and mutual responsibility. The social capital that these

relationships are supposed to create supports achievement of collective and individual goals and leads to both economic development and civic participation.




#### *Bridging, Bonding, and Linking Social Capital*

According to Saegert and Winkel (1998), those using social capital strategies to combat neighborhood distress need to consider all three levels of social capital: bridging, bonding, and linking. Bonding social capital is usually defined as association and trust among neighbors, or strong social bonds, and effective organizations within a community (Putnam, 1993, 2000; Saegert & Winkel, 1998; Larsen, Harlan, Bolin, Hackett, Hope, Kirby, Nelson, Rex, & Wolf, 2004). These ties are socially closer (involving few people, usually family, friends, and maybe the community) and not always geographically closer (involving people that live near each other). Putnam suggests that bonding social capital is good for "getting by." Bonding (exclusive) social capital refers to relations amongst relatively homogenous groups such as family members and close friends and is similar to the notion of strong ties. Putnam (2000) lists examples of bonding social capital as being ethnic fraternal organizations and church-based women's reading groups (see Table 2).

In comparison, bridging (inclusive) social capital refers to relations with distant friends, associates, and colleagues. It is described as a set of cross-cutting and cooperative ties, and occurs when members of a group connect with members of other groups to seek access or support or to gain information (Larsen et al., 2004). Saegert and Winkel (1998) contend that bridging social capital establishes horizontal ties between associative organizations and supports the formation of alliances and coalitions across communities (i.e., across local institutions, between different communities, between poor and affluent communities). Putnam (2000) differentiates between bridging and bonding by suggesting that "...bonding social capital constitutes a kind of sociological super glue, whereas bridging social capital provides a sociological WD 40..." (p. 19). Putnam lists examples of these as being civil rights movements and ecumenical religious organizations. These ties tend to be weaker and more diverse but more importance in "getting ahead" (Putnam, 1993, 2000).

On the other hand, linking social capital refers to relations between individuals and groups in

**Table 2.** Types of Social Capital

Type	Description
<p style="text-align: center;">Bonding (Exclusive) <b>Strong Social Bonds and Trust</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● An association and trust among neighbors, or strong social bonds, and effective organizations within a community (Putnam, 1993, 2000).</li> <li>● These ties are socially closer (involving few people, usually family, friends, and maybe community) and not always geographically closer (involving people living close to each other) (Putnam, 1993, 2000; Saegart &amp; Winkel, 1998; Larsen et al., 2004).</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;">Bridging (Inclusive) <b>Cross-Organization Partnerships</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A set of cross-cutting and cooperative ties occurs when members of a group connect with members of other groups to seek access or support or to gain information (Saegart &amp; Winkel, 1998; Larsen et al., 2004).</li> <li>● Establishes horizontal ties between associative organizations and supports the formation of alliances and coalitions across communities (i.e., across local institutions, between poor and affluent communities) (Putnam, 1993, 2000; Saegart &amp; Winkel, 1998; Larsen et al., 2004).</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;">Linking (Inclusive) <b>Cross-Boundary Alliances with External Resource Networks</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Refers to "relations between individuals and groups in different social strata in a hierarchy where power, social status, and wealth are accessed by different groups" (Cote &amp; Healy, 2001, p. 42).</li> <li>● Includes the capacity to leverage resources, ideas, and information from formal institutions beyond the community, which facilitates cooperative relationships in which power and control by one side are higher than on the other side (Saegart &amp; Winkel, 1998).</li> </ul>

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different social strata in a hierarchy whereby power, social status, and wealth are accessed by different groups (Cote & Healy, 2001). Woolcock (2001) extends this to include the capacity to leverage resources, ideas, and information from formal institutions beyond the community. This type of social capital facilitates cooperative relationships in which power and control by one side are higher than the other, creating synergy with financial and public institutions or constructive connections with mainstream economic and political institutions in order to access public and external resources (Saegart & Winkel, 1998).

*Criticisms of Social Capital*

Although theory and research suggest the positive effects of social capital for residents of distressed neighborhoods, scholars have also noted its possible negative effects (Briggs, 1998;

DeFillipis, 2001). These criticisms have to do with the downside of social capital. Opponents of social capital identified four negative consequences: exclusion of outsiders, excessive claims on members, restrictions on individual freedom, and downward-leveling norms. (Portes & Landolt, 2000; Portes, 1998, 2000). More recent works recognize that not all forms of social capital are necessarily productive and may be restrictive and exclude outsiders from enjoying the benefits of social capital (Putnam, 2000; Putnam & Feldstein, 2003). For example, social capital is inherent in urban gangs; yet, these types of social networks are counterproductive. In this context, the stronger types of social capital, such as bonding, benefit those within the group. There are also doubts if networks such as voluntary organizations can revive civic and political engagement (Boggs, 2001). Boggs argues that traditional voluntary

organizations (e.g., social clubs, fraternities, and sports leagues) declined because they “lost their *raison d’être* [reason for being] as their goals became outdated” (p. 284). Despite these criticisms, research evidence clearly indicates that social capital is a compelling tool for community development in distressed neighborhoods, including within first-ring suburbs.

### **Social Capital Stock within the Context of First-Ring Suburbs**

There has been extensive documentation of the challenges experienced by first-suburbs. The problems that were initially common in inner-cities are now visible in the first-suburbs. These communities are often faced with a difficult confluence of problems: aging population to go with aging infrastructure, declining business districts along with the lack of space for new development, and declining homeownership, as well as a decreasing tax base. However, first-suburbs often lack the support mechanisms (from state and federal government) necessary to alleviate decline and encourage community reinvestment. Therefore, first-suburbs must find alternative means to promote neighborhood stability and revitalization.

Research specifically related to first-suburbs and neighborhood revitalization consists of case studies conducted by Orfield (2000), Hudnut (2003), Ogorzalek (2004), Puentes and Warren (2006), and Peiser and Schmitz (2007). Each study indicated that some form of social capital was necessary for neighborhood revitalization to occur within the first-suburbs. For instance, Ogorzalek (2004), conducted first-suburbs case studies of Richfield, Minnesota and Santa Ana, California that employed social capital building as a mechanism to mobilize human, physical, and financial capital to revitalize neighborhoods. Both communities utilized community organizing, including developing public-private partnerships (among community residents, local businesses, nonprofit and private developers, and government institutions) to leverage community capital. Their efforts resulted in new public infrastructure, rehabilitation of blighted housing, and decreased crime. Additionally, Orfield (2000) and Puentes and Warren (2006) identified regional collaboration and cohesion as a criterion for neighborhood revitalization in the suburbs, while Peiser and Schmitz (2007) argued that suburban stability and regeneration must entail components of good leadership, community participation, and civic and cultural engagement.

Based on evidence from the literature, it can be argued that social capital is a viable tool for community development within distressed communities, including first-suburbs. However, the extent to which social capital is able to address all the challenges of first-suburbs depends on the specific context in which first-suburban communities mobilize their social capital to implement community development initiatives. Intuitively, the basic idea of social capital is that one’s social networks (e.g., family, friends, and associates) constitute an important asset which can be called upon in a crisis and/or leveraged for material gain. Therefore, it can be implied that those communities endowed with a rich stock of social networks and civic associations will be in a stronger position to confront neighborhood decline and/or take advantage of new opportunities (Woolcock, 1998). Moreover, neighborhoods with high levels of social capital might be expected to respond effectively to the forces of change and, in doing so, maintain or even enhance stability. For instance, Onyx and Leonard’s (2010) study of social capital indicated high performing communities (high economic growth) demonstrate considerably higher levels of social capital, with strong internal and external networks, than poor performing communities do. In addition, Flora and Flora (1997) analyzed a national sample of non-metropolitan communities. They conclude that communities with a larger number of formal organizational ties to the outside were more likely to have developed successful economic development projects compared to communities with fewer such ties. Thus areas with relatively low levels of social capital may be expected to succumb to the forces of change and experience decline.

Conversely, the absence or disuse of social ties can have an equally important impact. Ostrom’s (1999) analysis of social capital found that if unused, social capital deteriorates rapidly. If there is an absence of social capital in the group, neighborhood, or community, it will not be possible for those people to work together for the common good. Causes of low social capital result from several factors. One factor is the absence of human capital required for social capital’s core building blocks (e.g., self-esteem, trust, communication skills). Second, there are inadequate levels of material well-being (i.e., people are struggling for survival) within the community. Third, there is inadequate physical infrastructure such as places to meet, public spaces, telephones, and newspapers. Last, the human, economic, and

physical infrastructure pre-requisites are present, but there have been no opportunities to develop networks and interconnections among people.

While several first-suburban communities may share a similar general context, each will be unique. Therefore, first-suburban communities characterized by the absence of social networks, lower-income residents, lower populations of educated residents, and the lack of governmental resources (e.g., funding, political support, and staff) may tend to have lower levels of social capital stock. In comparison, first-suburban communities with a high number of neighbor networks present, higher-income residents, higher populations of educated residents, and access to governmental resources (e.g., funding, political support, and staff) may tend to have higher levels of social capital stock. However, in either case, the ability to mobilize and use social capital can lead to positive community development outcomes. This is illustrated by evidence from community development activities initiated by social networks in two first-suburbs within the Greater Cincinnati region.

### **Illustrations of Low Social Capital Stock Within the First-Ring Suburbs: Elmwood Place, Ohio—Context**

Elmwood Place is a village with a 79% white and 15% African American population. It is a lower-middle class community with a population of 2,188 (U.S. Census, 2010). With only a third of a square mile in area, it is the second smallest jurisdiction in the county but ranks the highest in population density (Hamilton County Regional Planning Commission, 1990). The village was established in the mid-1790s as the first white settlers moved into the area. After World War II, more families began to favor the newer suburbs in comparison to Elmwood Place, which was built out with no developable land for modern housing. Retail shops closed. The village tried to attract more industry to build up the tax base, but few new ones moved in. Urban renewal projects stalled, and public services were cut back severely. By the early 1980s, Elmwood Place faced a fiscal crisis that was resolved only upon implementation of a financial plan developed by state officials (Giglierno & Overmyer, 1988; Ellison, personal communication, January 2007).

Over time, the Elmwood Place continued its downward spiral. This is visible in the decline of its residential neighborhoods and business corridor. Today, its quiet, quaint residential neighborhoods

are plagued with pockets of run-down and abandoned homes due to years of neglect or recent foreclosures. There are areas within its neighborhoods with aging, deteriorating, and/or obsolete housing stock. Most of the homes within Elmwood Place are over 90 years old and are in need of repairs. This is reflected in the village's housing values. The median selling price in 2010 was \$21,000. This is \$74,450 less than the median selling price for Hamilton County (\$95,453) overall (Cincinnati MLS, 2011).

To make the situation worse, the pressing issue of foreclosures has affected the community. In 2000, approximately 120 of 1,111 Elmwood Place's homes were vacant or foreclosed, and this trend has continued. In 2010, the village ranked 25th out of 49 communities in completed foreclosures in Hamilton County (Working in Neighborhoods (WIN), 2010). Its business district also suffers from elements of decline. Once a thriving and bustling commercial area, its business district now resembles a ghost town. Empty storefronts and vacant, decaying buildings line its main street like empty caskets. At its peak in the 1950s, the village had over 100 thriving businesses along its main corridor (Ellison, personal communication, January 2007). Today it has fewer than 10.

Since 1980, the village has steadily declined 23% in both its population and household incomes. In addition, the Elmwood Place has a higher population of low to moderate income persons than other jurisdictions within Hamilton County. For example, the median household income in 2009 was \$31,806, which is \$20,223 less than the national median and \$11,557 less than that of Hamilton County, while the per capita income for the village in 2000 was \$13,466, one of the lowest in Hamilton County. Of Elmwood Place's 774 households, approximately 20 percent of the population and 23 percent of families are below the poverty line. In Hamilton County's 49 jurisdictions, Elmwood Place ranks second among percentages of families living below the poverty line (20%), and 47th in median family income (see Table 3). Since 1980, the poverty rate has increased by 10%.

### **Social Capital Stock: Mobilization and Use**

*Cross-Boundary Alliances with External Resource Networks (Linking) and Developing Partnerships with Outside Organizations*

Given the Elmwood Place's problems, the mayor of Elmwood Place decided to take steps to try to stop or slow the decline. In 2007, the mayor



**Table 3.** Community Context: Village of Elmwood Place

Population			Poverty %			Household Income			Social Capital Stock
1980	2010	Change %	1980	2009*	Change %	1980**	2009*	Change %	Village Mayor and Council, Housing Opportunities Made Equal, Hamilton County (RPC and CCD), Working in Neighborhoods; Homestead and Urban Redevelopment Corporation
2,840	2,188	-23	17.4	19.1	10	\$41,075	\$31,806	-23	

U.S. Census 1990, 2000, 2010; American Community Survey, 2005–2009; Minnesota Population Center, 2009.

\*Note: This was most recent data available for this variable (2009 Dataset, U.S. Census Bureau, 2005–2009, American Community Survey.

\*\*Note: 1980 median income dollars were converted to constant 2009 dollars by multiplying 1979 dollars by 3.34%. This variable, constant within years, inflates or deflates dollar amounts to the amount they would have represented in 2009. 1980 dollars were converted to 2009 dollars by multiplying by 3.34%, the annual inflation rate for 1980–2009.

solicited the assistance of the Hamilton County Regional Planning Commission (HCRPC), a county agency that provides advisory planning services to county municipalities upon request. Toward the end of 2007, the HCRPC completed a community plan entitled The Village of Elmwood Place Project Impact Plan, at the village’s request. A recommendation of the plan called for the village to seek a nonprofit housing organization to assist with the redevelopment of its residential neighborhoods. The mayor and council were open to this recommendation and agreed to have the staff at HCRPC contact a nonprofit housing organization (Ellison, personal communication, January 2007). The HCRPC staff and mayor met with WIN’s executive director and were able to encourage her to assist Elmwood in reinvesting in its housing stock through acquisition, rehab, and resale, as well as in new infill housing.

WIN is a nonprofit housing CDC located in the urban community of South Cumminsville in Cincinnati and was created in 1978 to give low and moderate income residents a voice in issues that affected them. WIN committed to complete 10 housing units in Elmwood Place over a five-year time span, beginning in 2008 (B. Busch, personal communication, February 15, 2008). WIN has acquired two homes so far. To further assist with the implementation of this endeavor, WIN applied for and was awarded \$360,000 by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) HOME Investment Partnerships Program grant funds to develop eight houses in Elmwood Place in 2008 (H. Wilson, personal communication, February 2008, June 24, 2011; S. Walsh, personal communication, January 21, 2011). WIN has since acquired other additional funding, but has proceeded slowly. Included in these funds is money for soft second

mortgages for first-time buyers of the properties. Beyond housing development, WIN agreed to provide homeownership training workshops in the village. The purpose is to encourage potential home buyers to consider the village as a place of residence, as well as to encourage existing renters to become homeowners (H. Wilson, personal communication, February, June 24, 2011).

During that same time the Elmwood Place also requested additional assistance from HCRPC to utilize a housing planner, under a new program established by a partnership between HOME and HCRPC. The housing planner was to develop a plan for improving housing conditions. As part of the planning process, two residential target areas were identified as areas in severe decline. Both of these areas had homes that were in substandard conditions needing repair (Mitchell-Brown, 2007). The housing planner assisted the village in applying for additional Community Development Block Grant funding to establish an exterior housing improvement program of which the village was awarded \$25,000. Under the direction of the housing planner, the village collaborated with the Hamilton County Community Development Department to oversee the program and select eligible applicants. From this program, 10 grants were awarded averaging \$3,000–\$5,000 to property owners for exterior housing repairs.

Two years after the housing study was completed, the village was awarded a federal grant of \$225,000 from HUD’s Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) Round 1 due to its high number of foreclosures. NSP was first funded in early 2009. These are limited programs specifically to address the problems of vacant, foreclosed, and abandoned properties. The funds are being used to acquire and rehab, or in some cases demolish, vacant, blighted, and abandoned homes,

to convert to active residential use (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2008; Hamilton County Community Development Department, 2011). The mayor knew that the village lacked the expertise, skill, and manpower to acquire and rehab homes. He sought a nonprofit housing developer, Homestead and Urban Redevelopment Corporation (HURC), which was recommended by the housing planner, to revitalize neighborhoods within the two target areas identified in the housing study.

HURC was initially organized and established in 1976 by the City of Cincinnati to take title to HUD inventory under the HUD 810 Urban Homestead Program, which is the City of Cincinnati's Home \$1 Lottery Program. As a result of 1999 city budget cuts, HURC became an independent organization. Today, HURC's focus is acquiring, rehabbing, and selling its current housing inventory and HUD \$1 houses (B. Kocher, personal communication, January 27, 2011; E. Rust, personal communication, January 27, 2011). By summer 2009, a formal partnership was developed between the village and HURC. Currently HURC is in the process of rehabbing two blighted foreclosed homes, which will be sold to homeowners.

Social capital stock within Elmwood Place is very low or almost non-existent. There are no formal or informal organizations that strive to promote community development. In regard to community development efforts, the mayor works mainly as a loner, without any true support from the Village Council. The village also lacks local financial resources to promote community development efforts. Although bonding and bridging social capital are virtually non-existent, the village does have characteristics of linking social capital. By collaborating with outside organizations, the Elmwood Place was able to improve its housing stock and homeownership within two of its targeted neighborhoods, using its network of resources (human, physical, financial) from outside institutions that the village itself lacked.

### **Illustration of High Social Capital Stock within the First-Ring Suburbs: City of Mount Healthy, Ohio—Context**

Mount Healthy, first settled as a village in 1817, was originally named Mount Pleasant. The town prospered economically in the following decades, with the establishment of some light manufacturing, as well as a number of taverns, a furniture factory, several garment factories, wagon

makers, and potteries. In the twentieth century, as automobile use became more widespread, Mount Healthy became a suburb of Cincinnati. Mount Healthy officially became a city in 1951. Located just 15 miles north of downtown Cincinnati, Mount Healthy consists of a collection of single-family residential neighborhoods (Mitchell-Brown, 2008).

Mount Healthy has shown signs of decline in its residential neighborhoods and business district. Two of the most common problems are an aging housing stock and poor property maintenance. Most of the homes are over 60 years old with a median selling price in 2010 of \$85,000 (U.S. Census 2000; Cincinnati MLS, 2011). Due their age, homes in Mount Healthy are in need of repairs. Foreclosures are also a pressing issue. In 2010, the village ranked 15th out of 49 communities in completed foreclosures in Hamilton County (WIN, 2010). Beyond residential housing issues, its business district faces problems of increased vacancy and declining property maintenance. For rent signs are becoming a common scene along its main street, and unkempt properties are progressively becoming a growing concern among business owners (Giglierno & Overmyer, 1988; B. Kocher, personal communication, January 27, 2011). Currently, Mount Healthy is a 74% white and 24% African American middle-income community (U.S. Census, 2010). Similar to Elmwood Place, Mount Healthy continues to experience decline in its population, business district, and residential neighborhoods. However, this decline is not as severe as in Elmwood Place. During the past three decades, Mount Healthy's population has decreased by 19%, and its household incomes shrunk by 21%. Mount Healthy's median household income is \$43,225, which is \$8,804 less than the national median and \$5,138 less than that of Hamilton County as a whole (U.S. Census, 2010). The per capita income for Mount Healthy in 2000 was \$18,662. In addition, Mount Healthy has seen a huge increase in issues related to poverty. Of Mount Healthy's 3,252 households, approximately 12% of the population and 12% of families are below the poverty line. Since 1980 its poverty rate has increased by over 100 percent (see Table 4).

### **Social Capital Stock: Mobilization and Use**

#### *Strong Social Bonds and Trust (Bonding) and Neighborhood Based Organizations*

The City of Mount Healthy has two key community-based networks that organize and mobilize to

**Table 4.** City of Mount Healthy Community Context

Population			Poverty %			Household Income			Social Capital Stock
1980	2010	Change %	1980	2009*	Change %	1980**	2009*	Change %	City Safety Service Director, Mayor and City Council, Business Association, Economic Development Committee Hamilton County (RPC and CCD), Community Improvement Corporation, Beautification Committee, Mount Healthy Alliance, Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority
7,562	6,098	-19	5.4	11.6	115	\$54,700	\$43,225	-21	

Source: U.S. Census 1990, 2000, 2010; American Community Survey, 2005–2009; Minnesota Population Center, 2009

\*This was the most recent data available for this variable.

\*\*1980 median income dollars were converted to constant 2009 dollars by multiplying 1979 dollars by 3.34. This variable, constant within years, inflates or deflates dollar amounts to the amount they would have represented in 2009. 1980 income was converted to 2009 dollars by multiplying the annual 1980–2009 inflation rate by 3.34%.

make improvements within the city’s residential areas and business corridor. The first network is the local community business association, the Mount Healthy Business Association (MHBA). The organization was initially formed over 50 years ago as a forum for business networking and marketing. During the past two decades it has transformed into not only a networking forum, but also a mechanism and resource for community improvement initiatives within the city. Members of the business association partnered with the city administration and council to improve relations between the businesses and the community through community events such as the Annual Celebrate Mount Healthy/Car Show, Mount Healthy Business Expo, and Annual Winter Social. This organization uses these events to raise funds to make infrastructure improvements within the business corridor, such as parking lot improvements (M. Fey, March 8, 2011, personal communication; B. Kocher, personal communication, January 27, 2011; T. Lombardo, personal communication, March 8, 2011).

Currently, the business association has collaborated with the city to improve property maintenance within the business district to implement a self-imposed property code maintenance program. Members of the business association began to see an increase in the number of poorly maintained properties and wanted to take a proactive stance to address this problem. The Business Property Maintenance Initiative allows the business owners to work collaboratively with the city property maintenance code enforcement officer to document and report issues of property maintenance and go after property owners to make the necessary improvements. In addition to the property maintenance program, the MHBA also joined forces with the city administration and council in developing the

Economic Development Committee (EDC). This committee is charged with addressing issues of business vacancies. In order to do this, the EDC has developed an action plan for business recruitment and retention with the hope of filling the vacancy gaps in the business district. They also are sponsoring business education seminars for new and existing businesses within the city (C. Graham, personal communication, May 29, 2011; B. Kocher, personal communication, January 27, 2011).

A second network is the city’s Community Beautification Committee, a group of resident volunteers. This group was started in the early 2000s by a resident who wanted to make the city a more attractive, inviting, and walkable community. In her quest, she solicited several of her neighbors and established the Mount Healthy Beautification Committee. The group solicits donations from residents and businesses to implement community beautification projects throughout the city. Projects include planters in the downtown area, landscaping of the community center and pocket parks, and neighborhood clean-up of public green-spaces (C. Graham, personal communication, May 29, 2011; B. Kocher, personal communication, January 27, 2011).

**Cross-organization Partnerships (Bridging)**

*Developing Partnerships with Inside Organizations*

The Mount Healthy Alliance, Inc. is a volunteer driven organization of churches in the area to address issues of poverty and hunger within the city. Their belief is that they can serve more of their community by joining together than by acting individually (K. Lorenz, personal communication, March 8, 2011). The organization emerged in 2007 as a result of a community pastors meeting during which many pastors brought up

the issue that they were seeing more and more people asking for assistance. They thought the best way to manage the problem would be to form an organization of all churches to address that situation, which was eventually called the Mount Healthy Alliance (MHA). As part of the alliance, each member congregation provides food and other items needed for the pantry. The congregations also provide financial support and volunteers to operate the pantry. All staff members work on a volunteer basis. MHA also solicits volunteer assistance from local high schools and other community organizations. They also receive assistance in the form of food donations from agencies such as the Freestore Foodbank.

Over the past two years, the MHA's program has grown based on the community's need. The MHA's main operation is its food pantry, which operates much like a grocery store. Patrons come to the pantry and fill out paper work confirming that they are eligible to receive food based on USDA income guidelines. In 2007, MHA served approximately 45 to 50 families a month. In 2010, they served an average of 245 households a month (K. Lorenz, personal communication, March 8, 2011).

### **External Alliances Partnerships (Linking)**

#### *Developing Partnerships with Outside Organizations*

Comprised of residents, business owners, and council, Mount Healthy's CIC is a nonprofit organization focused on economic development within the city. The Mount Healthy CIC began over 20 years ago. The need for the CIC at that time was for redevelopment. Established as a private 501(c)3 attached to the city, the CIC serves as its economic development arm. The key element is the capability to acquire property more effectively than a public entity, such as a city. The CIC is only activated as needed and has two major initiatives: (1) to land bank properties within the downtown area of the city, and (2) the Martin Street/CMHA Housing project (B. Kocher, personal communication, January 27, 2011; S. Wolf, personal communication, February 24, 2011).

In 2009, the city administration and the CIC collaborated with a local public housing agency, the Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority (CMHA), to acquire vacant and abandoned multi-family properties in the city's most distressed residential neighborhood along Martin Street. The goal of the partnership was to revitalize the neighborhood and to establish senior housing

within this community. CMHA's mission is to "provide quality, affordable housing solutions in Hamilton County communities by strengthening and expanding housing opportunities for families to choose self-sufficiency" (Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority, 2011, p. 4). The city's former mayor and current attorney initially approached CMHA and began the discussion of opportunities for them to assist the city in neighborhood revitalization. He knew CMHA was potentially working in another first-suburban community and wondered if they would be interested in working in an area where there were similar circumstances. However, before an agreement was solidified, the city staff and council researched CMHA and visited some of their housing development projects. In addition, there were several meetings between the city staff, CIC members, and CMHA staff, which included discussions of the boundaries and expectations of all parties. Slowly, all groups were able to build and establish trust, which resulted in a development partnership.

In 2009, the city and CIC had been awarded \$225,000 in NSP funds to purchase 15 properties along Martin Street. When the city and CIC ran out of those funds, the city committed additional bond dollars to continue the purchase of properties for the revitalization project. In the meantime, CMHA received additional funds from NSP2 to assist with the redevelopment of the site. In spring 2012 demolition was completed, and a groundbreaking ceremony was held that summer, with a projected 2013 completion date. The completed project will be a \$1.5 million dollar investment (R. Ruberg, personal communication, February 24, 2011; B. Kocher, personal communication, January 27, 2011).

Compared to Elmwood Place, Mount Healthy has a relatively high level of social capital stock. There are at least two social capital networks that promote community development. There is evidence of bonding, bridging, and linking social capital, illustrating association and trust among members, strong social bond, and effective organizations within a community, as well as cross-cutting organizational ties and cooperative alliances with external resources. Mount Healthy's mayor, council, and city administration are also actively engaged in community development efforts with their community-based organizations as well as other organizations outside the community.

### **Conclusion**

The lower level of social capital stock in Elmwood Place is largely a result of its context.

For instance, Elmwood Place is characterized by the absence of neighbor networks, lower-income residents, less educated population, and lack of governmental resources. Because of its context, many residents within the community are struggling to get by and may not have the time to devote to community development efforts. Unlike Mount Healthy, Elmwood Place lacks the community social networks to help address most of the challenges it is experiencing. There are no neighborhood community improvement corporations or business associations to attend to its deteriorating business district. Despite the lack of bonding and bridging stocks of social capital, Elmwood Place has been able to improve its residential neighborhoods by using resources and skills from organizations outside the community. This use of linking social capital helped to foster positive community development initiatives for the village. For instance, the exterior housing improvement program administered by the county helped to improve over 10 homes in distressed neighborhoods. The implication is that although weak in some instances, social capital stock is a possible instrument for neighborhood revitalization.

The concept of social capital has been used broadly to explain neighborhood dynamics within the past several decades, being deeply connected to neighborhood revitalization issues. Social capital's role and function in the community development-neighborhood revitalization process within first-suburbs is as a catalyst for action and mechanism for the obtaining and sharing of resources (e.g., human, financial, and physical capital) and knowledge (e.g., ideas, best practices, and opportunities). In the case studies of the first-suburbs in Cincinnati, the mobilization and use of social capital occurred to address a real or perceived need/concern identified by residents and business owners within the neighborhoods. For example, the businesses in Mount Healthy felt that their business area was declining and organized to take steps to deal with its problems.

Based on evidence from the literature and case examples, social capital is a viable and necessary community development tool for compellingly addressing challenges of the first-ring suburbs. The link between community development and social capital is a significant factor in improving neighborhood conditions within the first-suburbs, particularly those issues at the micro-scale (e.g., neighborhood blight and vacancies, crime, declining business district, older and sometimes

obsolete housing stock, population loss). Social capital reflects the ability of community members to participate, cooperate, organize, and interact. Within this framework, the success of social capital depends on the specific context in which it occurs. Given certain conditions, social capital can be considered an enabling resource that improves the effectiveness of other community capital inputs in development. Simply put, those communities endowed with a rich stock of social networks and civic associations will be in a stronger position to confront suburban decline. In comparison, those first-suburban communities with low social capital stock will be in weaker positions to promote community development. However, it is not necessarily the level, but the presence, of social capital that is critical for neighborhood revitalization to occur.

The illustrations demonstrate the role and function of social capital in the first-suburbs as change agent and catalyst for action and sharing of resources among community members, local officials, and public and nonprofit agencies. In each case, social capital is mobilized to address neighborhood problems. As such, concerns such as community image, neighborhood crime, or poor property maintenance seemed to be addressed by community-based organizations and local government (e.g. beautification committee) either through individual programs or projects or via cross-organizational alliances. In comparison, problems of housing and foreclosures tend to be addressed through cross-boundary partnerships and collaborative arrangements between public entities and outside institutions (e.g., local government and public housing agency or nonprofit housing provider).

The cases demonstrate that local governments are key players in the development of community driven social capital and the success of neighborhood improvement initiatives. Though limited in financial support, local governments provide moral support to neighborhood-based organizations, as well as in-kind support through the use of materials, supplies, or staff. In return, neighborhood-based organizations assist local governments in building community character and image by neighborhood improvement projects and programs. In addition, each case also illustrated how outside institutions play influential roles in the social capital-community development process within first-suburban communities. Problems, such as residential foreclosures and blight, tended to require knowledge, skills, and resources beyond

those available within the local communities (e.g., linking social capital) in order for neighborhood revitalization to occur. To address these types of issues local government administrators should continue to act as initiators in the residential redevelopment of their communities, soliciting and engaging nonprofit housing developers in neighborhood improvement partnerships in the first-suburbs.

The CDC-local government partnerships have proven beneficial in several respects. First, the establishment of partnerships allows elected officials and local governments to understand CDC practices and encourages buy-in. Second, establishing a partnership in the earliest stages of planning allows for open dialogue and communication between the CDCs, the communities, elected officials, and local government. The CDCs thereby understood what the community expected, and the community was aware of the types of housing products and programs that the CDC could offer. Third, the partnerships encouraged the sharing of public and private resources to complete housing projects. For instance, in each of the cases, the first-suburbs were willing to utilize their NSP funding to assist the CDCs in acquiring or rehabbing properties, while the CDCs were willing to use their existing lines of credit, as well as their expertise and their other resources. Fourth, forming partnerships encouraged a targeted neighborhood improvement model instead of the CDCs' customary silo method, bringing together complementary strengths. Finally, collaboration with nonprofit housing organizations enables multiple housing organizations, which individually lack capacity, to make a significant impact on the areas they target.

This study helps to set the stage for local government officials and community development practitioners to direct policies that encourage more partnerships with nonprofit housing CDCs in the first-suburbs. By developing public policies that inspire collaborative partnerships between nonprofit housing providers and local government and focusing on targeted neighborhood improvement, local governments can expand not only their capacity, but also the capacity of the CDC, as well as the overall impacts of redevelopment efforts. For instance, community revitalization efforts benefit from strengthened partnerships between the public and the nonprofit sector. If a CDC is actively addressing vacant properties in a neighborhood that has been identified as a target area for redevelopment by

the local authorities, closer collaboration between the two sectors can increase overall project capacity. The transformation of foreclosed single-family housing into new homeownership units can complement community redevelopment goals by stabilizing and increasing local property values. Moreover, local governments should promote policies that encourage nonprofit housing and CDCs to aim for a geographic concentration in housing redevelopment. When identifying foreclosed properties for acquisition and rehabilitation, choosing properties that are in close proximity to housing that is already in CDC ownership is beneficial to both the community and CDCs because properties clustered in a tight geographic area increase the possibility of reaching economies of scale, both financially and physically. Additionally, greater collaboration between CDCs should be explored. Neighborhood stabilization efforts can potentially be improved by closer partnerships among CDCs and through financial arrangements and general sharing of experience and know-how.

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